

KAREN HANMER



Star Poems by Karen Hanmer (2008). Pigment inkjet prints. 6¾" x 5¾" x ¾" closed. 17½" x 23" open. At once vast and minimal, sparse and rich, the night sky has always been a canvas upon which people project their myths and dreams. *Star Poems* presents quotes that document response to the night sky across the ages by philosophers, artists, and poets from Plato and Byron to contemporary writers, scientists, and astronauts. This text is paired with seventeenth-century mythological images of constellation forms and images of early star gazers on a background of a NASA photograph of the Milky Way. The book can be held in the hand and read page-by-page like a traditional book, can be removed from its jacket and unfolded flat to reference historical astronomical charts or contemporary NASA composite photos, or can be folded into an infinite variety of sculptural shapes.

Deep sky is, of all visual impressions, the nearest akin to a feeling.
– Samuel Taylor Coleridge, poet, 1772-1834.

My sculptural books and installations fragment and layer content to mirror the experience of personal and cultural memory. The work often has a playful presentation, taking the form of puzzles, games, or decks of cards. My work often includes text, is archival, and is a first person account. The pieces are made to be handled. The intimate scale and the gestures of exploration required to travel through a piece evoke the experience of looking through an album, a diary, or the belongings of a loved one.

At once vast and minimal, sparse and rich, the night sky has always been a canvas upon which people project their myths and dreams. Our survival once depended on watching the stars – when to plant, harvest, hunt, and prepare for the seasons; how to find our way to distant lands and home again. Though our well-being is no longer tied to observing the stars, we still feel compelled to look at the night sky. The artists' books and installation that comprise *Celestial Navigation* explore what people are searching for, and what they find, by performing the ancient ritual of looking at the stars.

For this installation, the walls of the gallery are sheathed in 6-foot

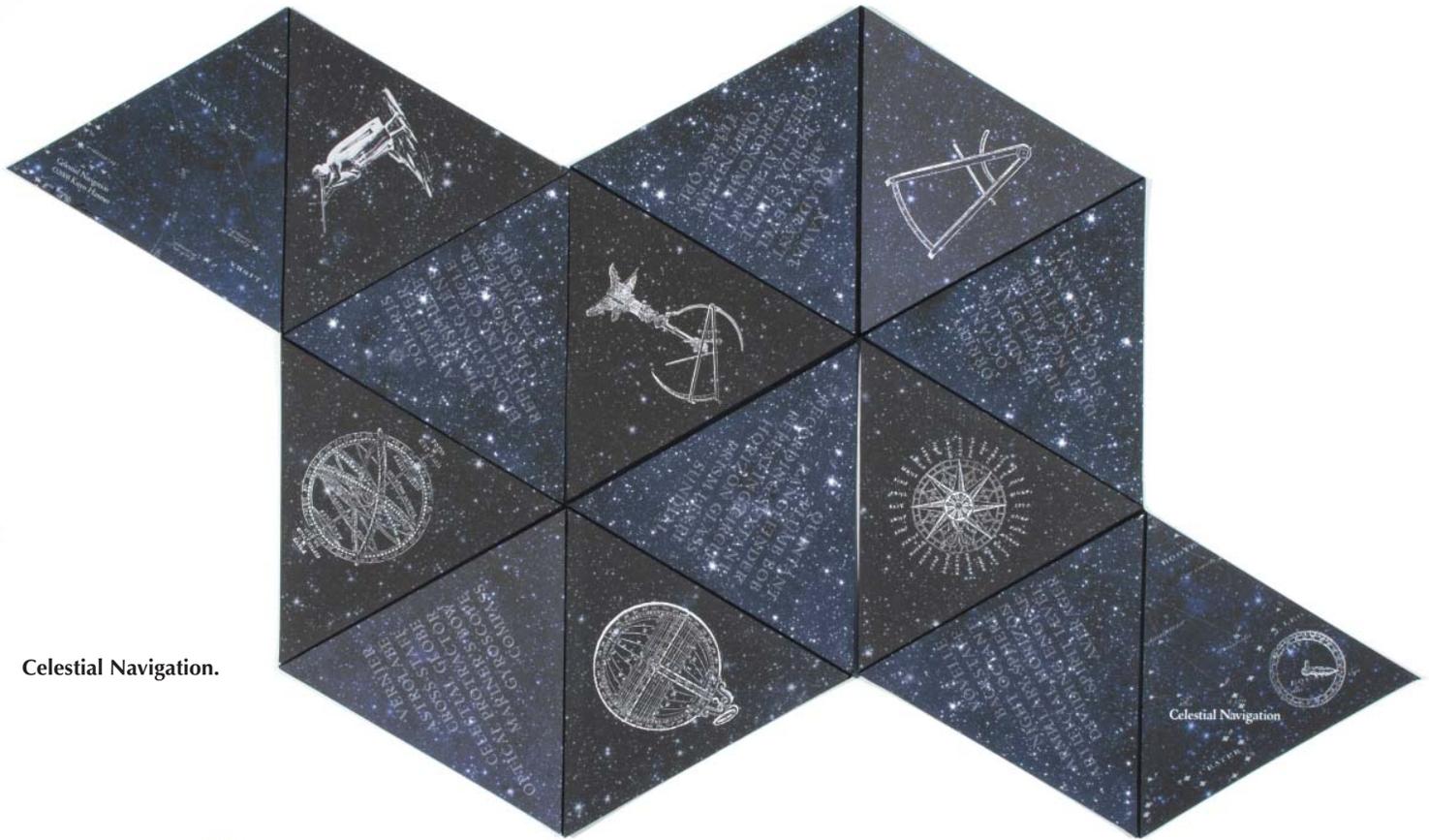
high panels of Japanese paper printed with an image of the Milky Way. These panels fill the viewer's field of vision and create a space for viewing two artists' books that take the form of a collection of hinged triangles. The books can be held in the hand and read page-by-page like a traditional book, can be removed from their jackets and unfolded flat to reference historical astronomical charts or contemporary NASA composite photos, or can be folded into an infinite variety of sculptural shapes.

In *Celestial Navigation*, a brief poem by the artist gives insight into what someone might be seeking when they look to the stars. This is paired with a catalog of ancient

and modern instruments used to navigate by the stars, historical images of these instruments, and a nineteenth-century star chart.

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When I follow the serried multitude of the stars in their circular course, I stand in the presence of Zeus himself and take my fill of ambrosia, food of the gods. – Claudius Ptolemy, astronomer and geographer, 85-165 A.D. ☞



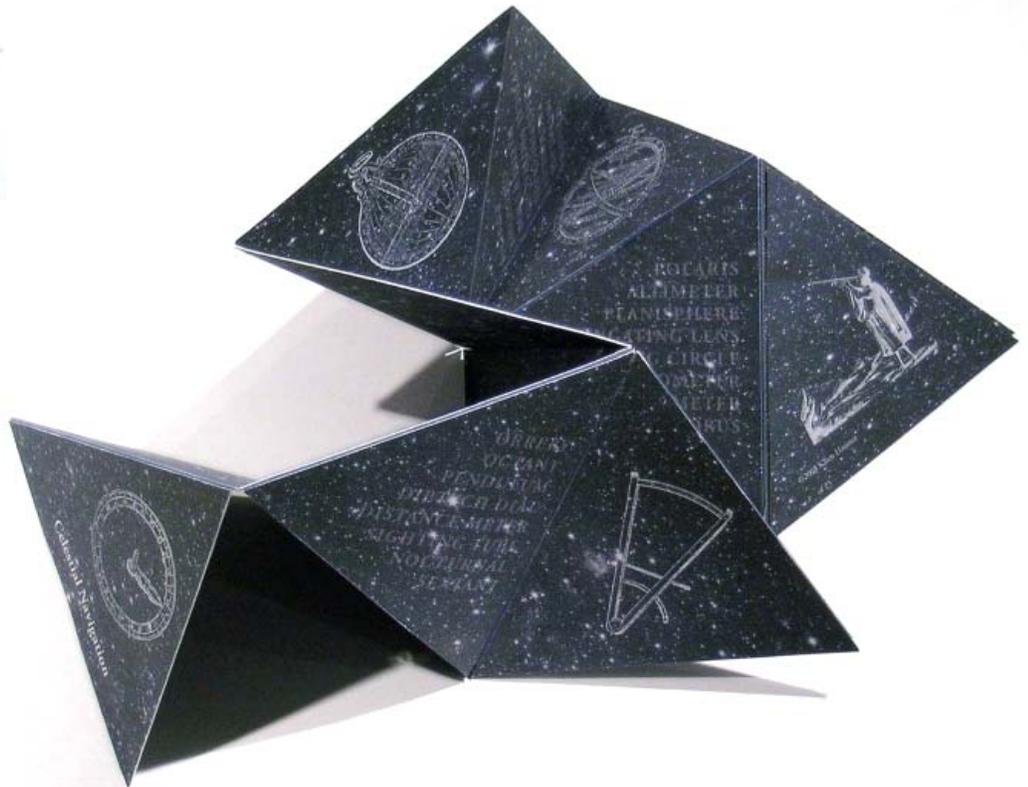
Celestial Navigation.



*In **Celestial Navigation**, a brief poem by the artist gives insight into what someone might be seeking and finding when they look to the stars. The poem addresses a lost loved one only as you. For me this piece is about my mother. The text is written in an open-ended enough way that the viewer is able to map the narrative to his or her personal experience. It still amazes me that the very personal can become universal.*

The text reads:

*I don't remember what you looked like.
I can't remember the sound of your voice.
I can't remember how it felt to have you
hold me –
I can't recall the feel or the frequency of
your touch.
Like ancient navigators, I look to the sky
to find my way back to you.
I see your face in the stars.*



Celestial Navigation (2008) by Karen Hanmer. Pigment inkjet prints. 6¾" x 5¾" x ½" closed.
17½" x 30" open.

KAREN HANMER COVER IMAGES



Celestial Navigation (2008) by Karen Hanmer. Pigment inkjet prints. 6¾" x 5¾" x ½" closed. 17½" x 30" open. It takes the form of a collection of hinged triangles. The book can be held in the hand and read page-by-page like a traditional book, can be removed from its jacket and unfolded flat to reference historical astronomical charts or contemporary NASA composite photos, or can be folded into an infinite variety of sculptural shapes.

